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100 W. Randolph Street
Suite 14-100
Chicago, Illinois 60601
312-814-6440

2329 S. MacArthur Blvd.
Springfield, Illinois 62704
217-782-4141
www.elections.il.gov

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Matt Dietrich
(217) 558-1955
mdietrich@elections.il.gov

SPRINGFIELD, IL – The following statement was issued to media at 3 p.m. March 16 by State Board of Elections Spokesman Matt Dietrich:

With Ohio announcing today that it is postponing its primary, which had been scheduled for tomorrow, I wanted to let you know that Illinois is proceeding with plans for tomorrow's primary as scheduled.

As of today we have had 504,000 early votes cast and 294,000 mail ballots sent to voters. The day before the 2016 primary, those numbers were 400,000 and 160,000 respectively. With early voting continuing today, we likely will see a substantial increase when early voting sites close. We along with the state's 108 local election authorities had been encouraging early voting for several weeks and in the past two weeks had increased our efforts so voters could vote early and avoid lines and crowds on election day out of concern for coronavirus.

Those efforts appear to have been successful as we will undoubtedly set new records for early and mail voting for a primary election.

We have worked with the Illinois Department of Public Health to make sure local election authorities [have proper guidance](#) for coronavirus safety in their polling places. We have provided polling place signage (attached) to local election authorities to alert voters and poll workers to best practices for preventing the spread of coronavirus. Local election authorities have, when necessary, consulted their local emergency managers for help in obtaining sanitizing supplies for their polling places.

Illinois has seen hundreds of polling place location changes in the past week and we have made every effort to keep our [online polling place lookup](#) database current so voters can find accurate information on where to vote. In many cases involving cancellations last week, election authorities were able to contact affected voters by mail to alert them to new polling places. In addition, many local election authorities are facing the additional challenge of election judges canceling. Local election authorities are going to great lengths to recruit replacements, including increasing judge pay in some cases. Please check with your local election authority for specific details.

As to the question of why Illinois is going forward with Tuesday's election, there are several factors to be considered. As already noted, much of the voting for this election already has been done. Also, at this point there is no date in the

foreseeable future when we can expect greater safety with any certainty. Taking action to move to an all-mail ballot system, as has been suggested by some media members, fails to take into account the needs of many disabled voters who are unable to cast paper ballots by mail.

To be clear, the State Board of Elections does not have the authority to change an election date. Doing so would require action by the General Assembly to amend the Illinois Election Code or a court order. We have no intention of seeking such an order nor has any other state official indicated that intent.

With Gov. Pritzker having ordered the closure of restaurants in Illinois as of tonight except for carryout service, we want to point out that in-person voting is a comparable transaction to picking up a takeout restaurant order or shopping at a grocery store. There is no need for close contact when requesting a ballot from an election judge and Illinois does not require voters to show ID; a voter's signature compared to the signature on record is proof of identity. Primary voting typically is a swift transaction that can be done at a safe distance from other voters.

We understand that this election presents voters with the difficult task of weighing civic duty with the safety of themselves and others. We believe that by following guidance from our state and federal health professionals, voters can vote safely at early voting sites today and at polling places tomorrow.

Thank you for your attention to accurate reporting of this rapidly unfolding situation. Please follow our Twitter feed at @illinoissbe for continued updates.

I will make every effort to return calls and emails but at this point the volume is too great so you may receive future mass briefings like this one.

The State Board of Elections is an independent state agency charged with the responsibility of having general supervision over the administration of election laws of the State of Illinois. Elections are administered locally by the State's 108 election authorities.

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